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ART REVIEWS/Helen A. Harrison

The Planet's Glories, and Some of Its Pains

'Out of This World'

Anthony Giordano Gallery, Dowling College, Idle Hour Boulevard, Oakdale. Through Oct. 3. 244-3016.

Earthbound yet otherworldly, the sculptural installations of Robert Boyd and Brandon Ballengee play with notions of the planet transformed by human arrogance.

Mr. Boyd's "Deathstars" are white globes of various sizes suspended from the ceiling of a darkened room. Each is studded with what at first appear to be spiky protrusions. On closer inspection, the spikes are seen to be robed figures carrying staffs and wearing pointed hoods -- a cross between Klansmen and ghostly cardinals. These figures dominate the landscape, each guarding its own piece of turf, but together symbolizing a worldwide tyranny of imposed order, uniformity and sterility. It results from the triumph of racial purification, with each globe representing the distilled essence of that warped ideology. Not only has it obliterated the diversity that gives the planet its vitality, but it also promises to destroy itself if its delicate equilibrium is disturbed.

In Mr. Ballengee's installation, the balance has been shifted, slowly but just as destructively, by a different kind of hostile influence. His piece, "Acme. Labs, Variation 4 (Further Examinations of Lumbricus Terrestris Fermi)," uses the classic science-fiction device of mutating an innocuous creature into a monstrosity by exposure to radioactivity. In this case, it is an earthworm serving as the canary in the coal mine that alerts humans to the presence of a deadly but unseen hazard.

To emphasize his point, Mr. Ballengee uses phosphorescent pigments activated by black light to make his simulated specimens glow in the dark. The giant worms themselves are confined to jars and tanks, inert and harmless on the surface but, with proper illumination, shown to be dangerously contaminated. Mr. Ballengee has given these paintings the phosphorescent treatment, too, so they emit the same eerie radiance as the worms. The whole irradiated ensemble is accompanied by a 1956 radio broadcast in which Bob Hope discusses the benefits of nuclear weapons.



A detail of one of Robert Boyd's "Deathstars."

The Science of Terror, And of Terra Firma

By Judith H. Bernstein
STAFF WRITER

THE ISLIP ART MUSEUM'S current shows, "LabWorks" and "Out of This World," which focus on the worlds of science fact and science fiction, respectively, highlight an old adage - that the horrors we imagine are much more frightening than any of our realities.

"Out of This World" has spawned a pair of unsettling installations in the museum's satellite (how appropriate!) Anthony Giordano Gallery. Robert Boyd's "Deathstars" presents us with seven shiny white Earth globes of various sizes, suspended from the ceiling and studded with white, pointy-hooded figures - maybe wizards, perhaps Klansmen. From a distance, the spheres appear to be medieval weapons, but the figures' repetition and angular lines also suggest the impersonal, cookie-cutter skyscrapers of a sterile world with no room for individuality.

The uneasiness suggested by "Deathstars" is amplified in Brandon Ballengee's "Acme Labs, Variation 4 (Further Examinations of Lubricus Terrestris Fermi)." The darkness here is rhythmically lit by a suddenly alive and then quickly dying circular fluorescent fixture. A collection of

landscape paintings mounted on a far wall seems mundane in the jolt of brightness, but glows silver and orange and otherworldly under black light, visible when the fluorescent winks out. Glass cases contain mysterious specimen jars; a soundtrack plays throbbing percussion, up-tempo techno music and Cold War-vintage newscasts delivered by stentorian announcers describing U.S. hydrogen-bomb development. In the center of the room, a table holds a large plastic tub containing liquid and a massive snake-like figure that coils in and out sprawls across the table and flops onto the floor.

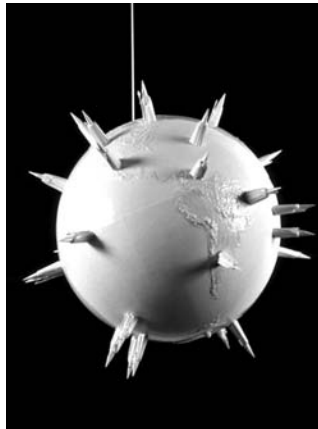
Is it a mutant earthworm transformed by an atomic blast, a metamorphosed vine run amok or the entrails of an alien being? "Acme Labs," the fevered offspring of a 1950s sci-fi B-grade flick and the most up-to-date episode of "The X-Files," doesn't offer answers, but does deliver dread and paranoia.

Some pieces by the eight artists represented in "LabWorks," the mixed-media show at the museum's Brookwood Hall gallery, have a dark side, too - particularly Heide Fasnacht's stark clay and metal sculptures of tornadoes, undersea explosions and bomb blasts. But "LabWorks" also includes works that suggest the playfulness and childlike wonder of scientists whose passion is unearthing discoveries in the world around us.

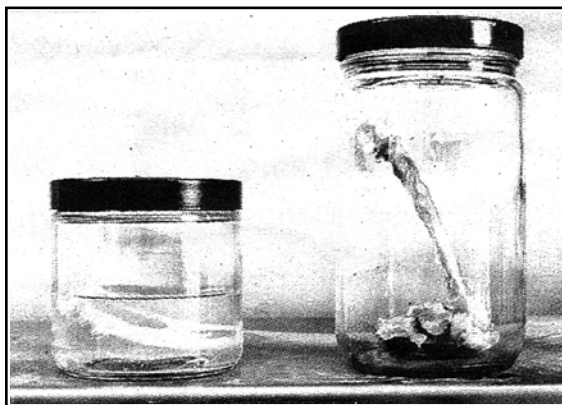
Steve Diehl's "Constants" is a set of 11 small graphite and charcoal drawings, each representing a law of physics. "G," which features two dark discs encircled by rings that partially intersect and overlap each other, illustrates "the Newtonian Gravitational Constant"; "C," which stands for the speed of light in a vacuum, consists of a dark rectangular field intersected by a single diagonal-white line. A pair of ghostly figures in

"Mp-Me-E" represent "proton mass, electron mass and an elementary unit of change."

Chemistry inspires Nancy Lorenz, whose playful "Studies for the Periodic Table of the Elements" contains 70 separate works in various media - some done on notebook paper, others on graph paper. David Nyzio's "Bacteria Rule" appears to be a bright blue watercolor but is actually a photograph produced by months' worth of algae growth; his "Topiary," created from algae, Plexiglas, water, lights, tubing and a steel pump, looks to be the porthole of a sunken ship that's been extricated from the drink for us to explore.



At left, the "Out of This World" exhibit features Robert Boyd's "Deathstars": medieval weapons, or symbols suggesting a sterile, impersonal world? Below, Catherine Wagner's still-life photo "Bone Tissue," is part of the "Labworks" exhibit.



Catherine Wagner's black-and-white photographs are laboratory still lifes - "Bone Tissue" shows specimen jars containing samples of bone; "Moon Rock Typology" is a half-dozen photos taken of two moon rocks subjected to different kinds of analytical experiments.

Mary Ziegler's arresting and fascinating kinetic works of steel, wood, thread, metal scraps and magnets appear to be alive in the way that stop-action animated movie creatures are alive - and not of this world. ■

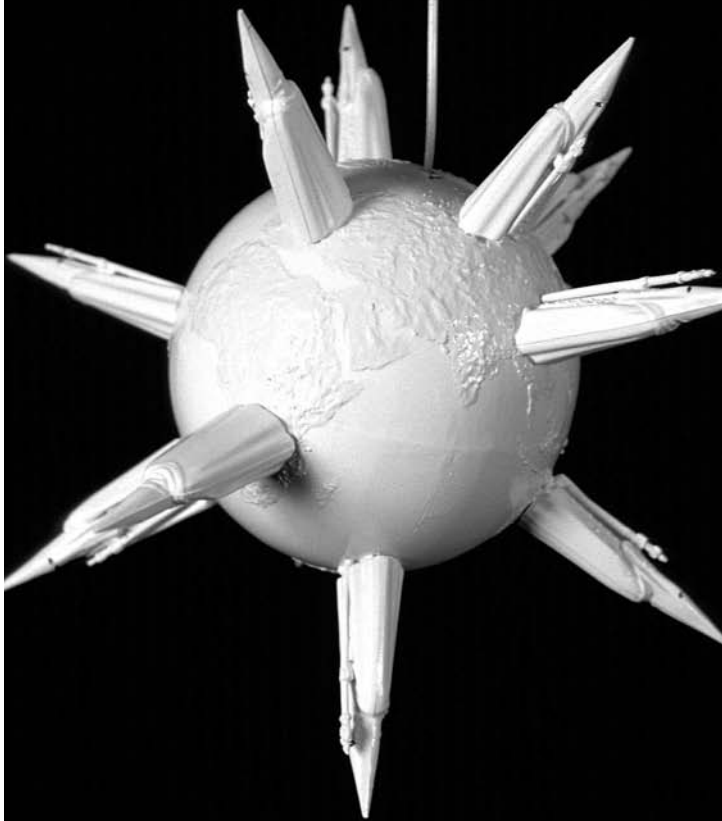
WHEN AND WHERE

LABWORKS. Through Oct. 17 at the Islip Art Museum's Brookwood Hall, 50 Irish Lane, East Islip. Call 516-224-5402.

OUT OF THIS WORLD. Through Oct. 3 at the Anthony Giordano Gallery at Dowling College, Idle Hour Boulevard and Biltmore Avenue, Oakdale. Call 516-244-3016.

MAKING A

POINT



Projectiles symbolize Robert Boyd, who becomes the artist in residence of USF New College.

COURTESY PHOTOS

"Deathstar" by sculptor Robert Boyd mixes look of secret fraternal order with sci-fi allusion to "Star Wars."

By Joan Altabe

Art Writer

Don't get him wrong, Robert Boyd's disturbing-looking sculpture may prompt memory of last year's Brooklyn Museum's shock art show "Sensation", but it's "quite the opposite," he said.

While wanting to "shock the numbness" out of people, Boyd sees his art as a prompter of thought, not the stun gun experience of "Sensation," such as the image of the Virgin Mary flecked with elephant dung.

It all comes down to intention versus interpretation, Boyd said in a telephone interview from his New York studio as he prepared to travel to Sarasota for an artist-in-residence stint at USF/New College.

He will be working with students on a project called "Like A Virgin," which he hopes will move beholders to see meaning they hadn't previously considered.

Boyd will offer a free public slide show on the project Thursday at New College's Mildred Sainer Auditorium.

"Like a Virgin" came out of a trip to Spain, where he saw a connection between bridal gowns, the garb of *Nazarenos* (Penitents) who march in cloak and cowl as a humbling gesture to their God during Semana Santa (Holy Week), and Ku Klux Klan costume.

Multiple meanings are the mark of Boyd's work, as in his "Deathstars," which are globes lacquered in a sci-fi white after the flying planetoid of the evil empire in the "Star Wars" film. Jutting menacingly from them are rocket-like forms that conjure up the pointy-hooded, robed figures of Klansmen.

That's what most Americans would see, Boyd said. But the hooded form also is the dress of the *Nazarenos*, which emerged from the Spanish Inquisition. There's yet another layer of meaning to the hooded figures. Boyd's art hero is Francesco Goya, who used silhouettes of shadowy figures to denote evil. You can see a version of this in the depersonalized, hulking figures of the firing squad in his most famous painting, "The Third of May."

A New York Times review of Boyd's "Death Star" last year fulfilled his wish that viewers find more than one meaning in his work. Art critic Helen A. Harrison saw the spiky protrusions studding the globes as a cross between Klansmen and ghostly cardinals:

"These figures dominate the landscape, each guarding its own piece of turf, but together symbolizing a worldwide tyranny of imposed order, uniformity and sterility."

Harrison saw all this as "triumphs of racial purification."

But the 31-year-old sculptor doesn't expect all of New York's art world to appreciate what he's doing.

"Things are really trendy in New York, very fashion-oriented," he said. "The art world here is not interested in social content. What you have right now is cuteness and decorativeness."

"I'm hoping for a visionary collector."

LIKE A VIRGIN

A slide show about Boyd's work will be shown at 7 p.m. Thursday in the Mildred Sainer Auditorium, 5313 Bay Shore Road, (just south of the Ringling Museum), Sarasota. The event is free. Call 359-4314. Boyd will be the artist-in-residence for USF/New College in conjunction with Ringling School of Art and Design.



Boyd draws a connection between matrimony, fraternity and fascism in this work-in-progress from his "Virgin" collection.